



**European Journal of Turkish Studies**

Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey

**11 | 2010**

**Labor Movement in Turkey**

---

## Communists and Compromisers: Explaining Divergences within Turkish Labor Activism, 1960-1980

**Brian Mello**

---



### Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ejts/4343>

ISSN: 1773-0546

### Publisher

EJTS

### Electronic reference

Brian Mello, « Communists and Compromisers: Explaining Divergences within Turkish Labor Activism, 1960-1980 », *European Journal of Turkish Studies* [Online], 11 | 2010, Online since 20 October 2010, connection on 19 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/ejts/4343>

---

This text was automatically generated on 19 April 2019.

© Some rights reserved / Creative Commons license

---

# *Communists and Compromisers: Explaining Divergences within Turkish Labor Activism, 1960-1980\**

Brian Mello

---

## **I. Communists and Compromisers: Explaining Divergences within Turkish Labor Activism, 1960-1980**

- 1 During the 1960s and 1970s two labor union confederations dominated the landscape of state-labor relations in Turkey. However, while both confederations faced similar political and economic contexts, the Confederation of Turkish Labor Unions [Türk-İş] and the Confederation of Revolutionary Labor Unions [DİSK] initially engaged in radically different strategies in pursuit of their political and economic goals. Generally, while Türk-İş engaged in a more conflict-averse business unionism, DİSK promoted a more radical political agenda that was inspired by socialist ideas and the belief that political unionism was crucial for bringing about greater democratization and socioeconomic justice in Turkey. This article focuses on why these two confederations, facing similar incentive structures, pursued divergent political paths.
- 2 In this article, I utilize a Weberian framework (one adapted in more recent rationalist theory) that first specifies “the rational course” of political action, and then focuses on why the actual course differed (Weber 1969: 32). For example, in *Consent, Dissent, and Patriotism*, Margaret Levi advocates a methodological approach to explaining political outcomes that begins with the assumption that “rational actors strategically interact until they reach an equilibrium outcome from which no one has an incentive to deviate” (1998:7). The articulation of such equilibrium points allows scholars to examine how exogenous shocks or changes in specified independent variables are likely to affect the behavior of particular political actors. In a sense, then, the analysis that follows takes its inspiration from the analytic narrative approach advocated by Bates, Grief, Levi,

Rosenthal, and Weingast (1998). Essentially, analytic narratives seek to explain particular political outcomes by blending insights from game theory and rationalist arguments with rich historical narratives. Levi argues, “A concern with the game logic builds both equilibrium analysis and institutions into the model. The new economic institutionalism clarifies what constrains or facilitates actions and what role information and beliefs play in affecting behavior (1997: 7). For Levi, “Model building begins by identifying the key actors, positing the ends they are maximizing or optimizing, and then explaining their behavior by reference to the constraints and strategic interactions that influence their choices” (1997: 9). Insofar as actors’ change behavior, such changes may result from the emergence of new rules or norms that inform the choices made by a group of actors, and may reflect institutional arrangements that reinforce these new norms (1997: 10). Consequently, the goal of both this article and of the advocates of analytic narratives is to provide parsimonious frameworks to explain particular problems that can account for actual historical complexity. Moreover, as in the analytical narratives offered by Bates et al, this study focuses less on structural explanations for political outcomes and more on “the interplay between strategic actors” (1998: 12). However, more so than typical rationalist theories, the argument advanced in this article draws from theoretical frameworks that focus on how ideas, identities, and conceptions of fairness influence the behavior of political actors and underpin instances of collective action.

- 3 Weber’s categories of social action represent a useful starting point for simplifying and explaining otherwise complex phenomena. However, because Weber’s categories are ideal types that are never entirely reflected by the reality of politics, I supplement Weberian insights with insights from the work of E.P. Thompson, Douglass North, and James March and Johan Olsen. Thus, I argue that the ideological preferences of labor union leaders and activists partially determines the strategic behavior of the labor side of state-labor relations. Moreover, I demonstrate that the split in the Turkish labor movement, upon which the second half of this article focuses, was premised on the emergence of new institutions with alternative logics of appropriateness.
- 4 I begin by examining some of the most important approaches in political science to explaining state-labor interactions. Here, I focus on the extent to which these interactions involve rational, goal-oriented strategic behaviour, and the extent to which ideological predispositions often trumps such cost-benefit rationality. Of particular concern here, is the extent to which the incentive structures created by state actions lead labor movement activists to behave in expected ways. Subsequently, I turn to the case of the Turkish labor movement. Examining labor movement texts, instances of collective action, and secondary literature, I evaluate the extent to which the schism that tore through the Turkish labor movement in the 1960s was the result of new understandings and identities (of the worker and the union), and how these new understandings subsequently shaped different sets of political choices. I conclude by suggesting how the history of the labor movement in Turkey can shed light on other instances of labor movement schism in general, and in particular, on how ideology matters in the context of divergences in labor movement activism.

## II. Explaining State Labor Relations: Rationality and/or Values

- 5 I use as a starting point for analyzing and explaining state-labor interaction, Collier and Collier's (1991) *Shaping the Political Arena*. Like Collier and Collier, I highlight how labor movement activism is as much a political as it is an economic phenomenon. For Collier and Collier, the period surrounding and following states' attempts to legitimate and shape the emergence of an institutional labor movement marks a critical juncture, or a period of dynamic change with long-term political consequences. On the whole, the politics of labor movements involves a dual dilemma: On the one hand, labor can be a crucial player in a state's need for legitimation, participation, and compliance, but an organized working class also poses a potential threat to other sources of political and economic power. Conversely, unions can benefit a great deal from state support, but close ties can risk organized labor becoming merely a tool of the state. For Collier and Collier, there are, thus, two main reasons for labor incorporation: to prevent worker protest from becoming too radical and to expand and extend the modern, activist state. They identify two types of labor incorporation: state and party incorporation.<sup>1</sup>
- 6 For my purposes here, the key insight from Collier and Collier's analysis is the idea that state-labor relations involve a dual dilemma regarding how state and movement actors should behave. How decisions are reached by the actors involved in this process determines the shape of state-labor relations in a given context. As a starting point, if we assume that state actors and labor movement activists are guided by what Weber calls rational, goal-oriented conduct, then we can develop an initial picture of what these decisions ought to look like. This involves articulating the basic goals or preferences state and labor actors are likely to have.
- 7 I assume the basic goals and preferences of labor movement actors are: First, to be recognized as a legitimate player in the political and economic system. This may involve such things as a consultative role in political decision making, protection against employer backlash, legal protections for the right to strike and organize, etc. And, second, to secure pecuniary benefits to members, for as Mancur Olson (1971) notes, this appears to be a critical element in overcoming collective action problems.<sup>2</sup> As Daniel Cornfield and Bill Fletcher (1998) point out, these goals can best be achieved by securing state allies. This is the case, Cornfield and Fletcher note, because labor's bargaining power – its ability to achieve its preferred outcomes – depends highly on the ability to gain state allies that can provide assistance in labor movements' battles with their key antagonists, capital. So, we can assume that labor movements' political strategies will seek, insofar as political opportunities are possible, to maximize allies in the state. This means either organizing a takeover of the state (a rare phenomenon, indeed) or more likely a moderation of tactics in exchange for increased access and protection.
- 8 State actors, for their part, I assume want to obtain the legitimacy that working class support can offer without giving up too much decision making power to labor movements. Thus, state actors, it can be assumed, prefer to adopt pro-labor policies that can incorporate unions into the existing political order, especially if this means creating the incentives for labor movements to forego more militant and destabilizing political activism. On the other hand, it can be assumed that, in the face of militant labor activism that threatens their hold on political power, state actors prefer to adopt repressive

policies that create disincentives (high costs, jail time, death from police action, closure of unions, etc.) for labor movements to engage in militant actions. Indeed, we know that when it comes to dealing with social movement activism, states often simultaneously engage in negotiation and repression, with the goal of incorporating or co-opting movement activists into existing political channels and at the same time alienating and neutralizing radical elements.<sup>3</sup>

- 9 Thus, if both state and labor movement actors exhibit goal-oriented behavior, we can hypothesize that if states are willing and capable of adopting pro-labor policies, labor movements will be willing to moderate their rhetoric, strategies and tactics. Furthermore, it is possible to map out the most *rational* course of state-labor actions. When labor activists organize and mobilize for collective action, their activism can either take a militant or a non-militant form. Following Maria Victoria Murillo, labor militancy is defined as “organized protests disrupting production or governance” (2001: 11).<sup>4</sup> Subsequently state actors (governmental officials and political parties), can choose either to adopt pro-labor policies, to ignore labor activism, or to engage in policies of labor repression. Once a governmental choice of action is made, labor movement activists respond, unless of course labor repression is overwhelmingly successful.
- 10 For purposes of simplification, I assume labor activists will choose to engage in either militant actions or non-militant actions depending on their expectations that state actors will help advance labor goals. State actors will want to use labor both to advance their electoral goals, and to advance the legitimacy of the state.<sup>5</sup> However, state actors will not want to give up too much power and control to labor. In short, state actors will try to prevent the emergence of a powerful and autonomous labor movement.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, insofar as these interactions become regularized, trust gets established, expectations become more credible, and state-labor interactions routinized.
- 11 Deciphering the payoffs for particular choice combinations requires considering the state and labor movement actors separately. In theory, the labor activists will prefer to achieve policy gains through non-militant activism, because although it can be an effective means for strengthening solidarity and working class identity, militant activism tends to be costly, divisive, and to mobilize opposition.<sup>7</sup> In theory, state actors will never want to grant policy concessions for militant labor activism.<sup>8</sup> Rather, state actors will want to promote labor participation contingent upon this participation supporting the state actor’s electoral, financial, and ideological goals. As a result, we should expect rational, goal-oriented state-labor interaction generally to converge on strategies of non-militant activism and (relatively) pro-labor policies.
- 12 If, on the other hand, labor activists exhibit a different type of behavior, then these patterns of interaction won’t hold. Toward this end, Max Weber (1969) identified four types of social conduct. In addition to goal-oriented rationality, which is based on an expectation that others will act rationally, he suggests some social conduct exhibits value-related rationality, some is affective, and some traditional. Traditional conduct is based on repetition, and over time can become more meaningfully oriented, or value-related. Affective conduct is motivated by emotional connection and feelings. It, too, can become value-related over time. Value-related conduct, therefore, is conduct “classified by the conscious belief in the absolute worth of the conduct” (1969: 59). Social action that exhibits value-related rationality is distinguished by the “conscious formulation of the ultimate values governing such conduct” (1969: 60). Weber summarizes, “Examples of pure value-related conduct would be the behavior of persons who, regardless of the

consequences, conduct themselves in such a way as to put into practice their conviction of what appears to them to be required by duty, honor, beauty, religiosity, piety, or the importance of a 'cause,' no matter what its goal" (1969: 60-61). Therefore, where labor movement activists exhibit value-related behavior, we should expect to find a commitment to an articulated vision and course of action regardless of positive and negative changes in the incentive structures that movements face.

- 13 Weber's framework, though parsimonious, perhaps draws too stark a distinction between behavior that exhibits the characteristics of cost-benefit analysis and behavior that is ideologically motivated. As with most Weberian ideal-type categories, it is difficult to definitively categorize the behavior of actual social actors as entirely value-related, or entirely goal oriented. All goal-oriented behavior is, in fact, shaped by larger ideological predispositions. This point has been made, in slightly different ways by E.P. Thomson's (1971) conceptualization of the moral economy, March and Olsen's (2004, 2008) discussion of the logics of appropriateness, and Douglass North's (1981) discussion of the role of ideology in explaining stability and change in economic history.
- 14 For Thompson, instances of collective action or social protest (particularly among the poor in England about whom Thompson's analysis focused) were almost always underpinned by a legitimizing notion, which "was so strong that it overrode motives of fear or deference" (1971: 78). Thompson refers to this legitimizing notion as "the moral economy," insofar as it embodies an effort to defend a set of social norms distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate behavior. Where public policies, new institutions, or broader structural changes violated these norms, social protest represented a rational response of the poor. Subsequently, James Scott (1976) applied an understanding of the moral economy of the peasant (one based on a subsistence ethic and not a profit-maximization ethic) to explain patterns of peasant rebellion in Southeast Asia. Thus, peasant behavior that may appear irrational given a set of behaviors prescribed by profit-maximization is nonetheless rational given the set of values advanced by the subsistence ethic.
- 15 For North, neo-classical economic theory, which focuses on narrow conceptions self-interested behavior characterized by cost-benefit calculations cannot effectively account for "behavior in which calculated self interest is not the motivating factor" (1981: 11). Thus, North suggests an understanding of the role of ideology in shaping behavior is especially important when explaining why there exists social cooperation and group participation despite incentives to be a free rider. For North, ideological motivations are critical for understanding both economic change and stability. As he states, obedience to the rules of society is better explained by beliefs in their legitimacy than by individual calculations of the costs and benefits of obeying rather than shirking rules. Indeed, there are certainly many benefits that can be derived from disobedience, but, as North points out, cheating, shirking, and stealing are far less common than an individualistic calculus of costs and benefits might suggest (1981: 11). On the other hand, the willingness of individuals to participate in collective action often requires the emergence of a common understanding that existing practices are unfair or illegitimate, and that collective action is required in order to address the sources of this unfairness. According to North, individuals are moved to alter their ideologies when "inconsistencies between experience and ideologies" accumulate (1981: 49). Moreover, in considering various forms of collective action North declares, "I am not arguing that these actions are irrational – only that the calculation of benefits and costs that we employ is too limited to catch other elements in people's decision-making processes" (1981: 46).

- 16 For North, “ideologies are intellectual efforts to rationalize the behavioral pattern of individuals and groups” (1981: 48). Ideologies, as North understands them, involve a comprehensive “world-view,” which allows for simplified decision making (1981: 49), and conceptions of fairness, which allow for moral and ethical judgments (1981: 49). For my purposes, the most relevant insights offered by North’s discussion of ideology is in his overview of the characteristics of a counter ideology: “If the dominant ideology is designed to get people to conceive of justice as coextensive with the existing rules and, accordingly, to obey them out of a sense of morality, the objective of a successful counter ideology is to convince people not only that the observed injustices are an inherent part of the existing system but also that a just system can come about only by active participation of individuals to alter the system” (1981: 54).
- 17 March and Olsen’s recent articulation of what they term the logic of appropriateness can further help to clarify how ideological considerations shape political behavior. Their argument is that, “most of the time humans take reasoned action by trying to answer three elementary questions: what kind of situation is this? What kind of person am I? What does a person such as I do in a situation such as this” (2004: 4)? In essence, March and Olsen argue that individuals’ actions are more often shaped by institutional perspectives than by self-interested rational calculations. For March and Olsen, “the processes of reasoning are not primarily connected to anticipation of future consequences as they are in most conceptions of rationality” (2004: 4). Rather, “to act appropriately is to proceed according to the institutional practices of a collectivity, based on mutual, and often tacit, understandings of what is true, reasonable, natural, right, and good” (2004: 4). Insofar as institutions create rules that “prescribe, more or less precisely, what is appropriate action” (2004: 7), the emergence of alternative institutions within the Turkish labor movement implies a rejection of the rules developed during the prior years of institution building in Turkey.
- 18 Alternative institutions can emerge for a number of reasons, including transformations in previously fragmented political systems that cause once separate institutional settings (each with its own logic of appropriateness) to come into contact with one another – often in profoundly irreconcilable ways. Alternative institutions may also emerge from larger social, political, or economic transformations that alter the experiences of individuals in ways that reduce the salience or legitimacy of what was once deemed “appropriate behavior” (2004: 15). For instance, March and Olsen point out, “Increased mobility or massive migration across large geographical and cultural differences may likewise create collisions that challenge established frames of reference and institutionalized routines. Such collisions,” they write, “may generate destructive conflicts, but they may also generate rethinking, search, learning, and adaptation by changing the participants’ reference groups, aspiration-levels, and causal understandings” (2004: 19).
- 19 What each of these approaches share is a belief that collective political action is shaped by larger values, conceptions of fairness, and identities. By drawing from these approaches, I seek to explain the split within the Turkish labor movement in the 1960s by focusing on how alternative ideologies emerged within the Turkish labor movement, in conjunction with alternative institutions.<sup>9</sup> Insofar as the existing economic policies and the regime of labor relations in Turkey was increasingly seen as unfair, the founding members of DİSK developed a counter ideology characterized by a more radical political agenda that called for greater direct action on the part of Turkish workers. Thus, what



emerged in Turkey was an ideologically fragmented labor movement, where different institutions maintained (at times) distinct goals for the political and economic development of Turkey, distinct conceptions of the role labor unions should play politically, and as a result, different levels of collective political action. In essence, different logics of appropriateness emerged within various factions of the Turkish labor movement during the mid-1960s. Thus, the historical narrative that follows seeks to shed light on what kinds of new understandings and identities (of the worker and the union) were formed, and how these new logics of appropriateness subsequently shaped different sets of political choices. The reality of divergence with the Turkish labor movement during the 1960s and 1970s suggests that the focus on state-labor interaction outlined above requires a supplemental focus on the strategic competition within the Turkish labor movement. Thus, increasingly during the period under consideration, conflict and competition within the Turkish labor movement helped to shape and reinforce the schism between DİSK and Türk-İş. I consider the importance of this competition for explaining the trajectory of the Turkish labor movement within the narrative offered below.

### III. Division in the Turkish Labor Movement

- 20 Widespread labor activism in Turkey is a fairly recent phenomenon. Though unions were present and active stretching back into the Ottoman Empire, the early Turkish state feared class antagonism and placed strict limits on labor movement organization.<sup>10</sup> Several aspects of the political and economic climate of the 1950s, however, helped to open opportunities for the growth of the Turkish labor movement. Foremost, political opportunities for working class mobilization during the 1950s were created by a marked trend toward urbanization and industrialization. In addition, after the on-set of multi-party competitive elections beginning in 1946, appeals to the concerns of labor unions and working class voters became increasingly common. Within the context of the Cold War, international support for the development of Turkish labor unions was provided, in part, by the AFL-CIO and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Finally, on an organizational level, perhaps the most important development within the Turkish labor movement during the 1950s was the emergence of the Confederation of Turkish Labor Unions (Türk-İş) as the first national confederation of labor unions in Turkey.
- 21 Especially during its early years, the rhetoric utilized by leaders in Türk-İş was not militant and was generally in line with prevailing state concerns about limiting class conflict. Toward this end, in its original governing laws, Türk-İş pledged not to organize “in a religious manner and not to use philosophical beliefs and political propaganda in struggle” (“Türk-İş’s Governing Laws, 1952,” 2002: 3). This was, in essence, a rejection of political unionism, and especially of socialist and communist ideologies. Rather, Türk-İş declared itself a “nationalist organization,” independent of political parties and the government. According to its governing laws, the confederation would not be used in political party propaganda or as a tool for spreading it, nor would it be “a tool for the advancement of foreign state ideologies” (*ibid* 2002: 4) – code for the confederation’s rejection of communism.
- 22 Officials from both major political parties (the ruling Democrat Party and the opposition Republican People’s Party) saw the emergence of Türk-İş as an opportunity to cut off any militancy of rank-and-file union members and control the union movement through ties



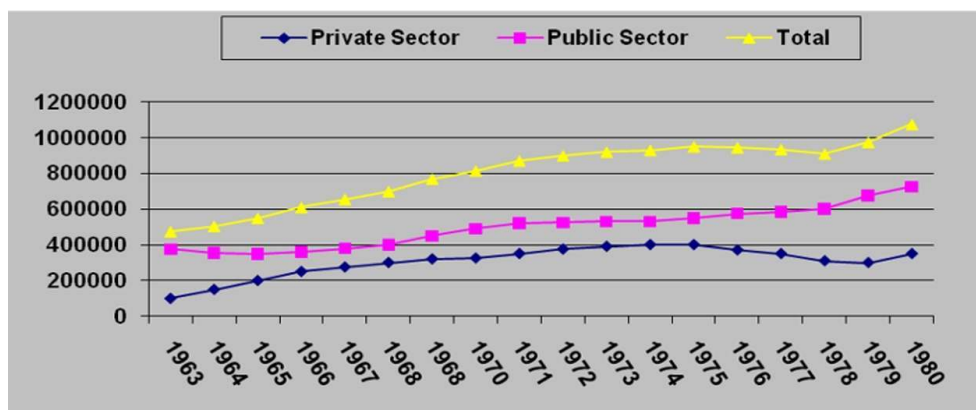
with its leadership. And both parties sought to tap into the emerging Turkish working class as a source of electoral support. For example, the Democrat Party [*Demokrat Partisi* (DP)] aligned with Türk-İş in a semi-corporatist relationship, whereby in return for popular support, the DP would pass legislation favorable to Türk-İş (and workers more generally). In essence, in an effort to prevent political action based on class interests, the state, under the DP, sought to control and limit the political action of working class organizations.

- 23 The DP's strategy of appealing to workers was one that sought to mobilize popular support without transforming the enduring limits and controls on working class associations and therefore without transforming prevailing state views of the legitimacy of class based politics. Throughout this period, the DP passed a number of pieces of legislation designed to benefit working class needs. The DP's legislation benefiting workers included: "paid weekends, annual leave, statutory bonuses, extensions of the scope of the Labour act and of social security, labor tribunals with a worker serving as judge, subsidized construction loans for workers, [and a] minimum wage" (Koç 1999: 36-37). At the same time, the DP repeatedly delayed and ultimately failed to act upon its promises to expand union rights by legalizing strikes.
- 24 Still, the Democrat Party was unable to achieve a lasting corporatist relationship with Türk-İş. In the late 1950s, as a result of economic hardships and the DP's enduring support for constraints on working class rights and political participation, Türk-İş began calling for the removal of legal obstacles to union growth and power. In particular, the confederation sought the right to strike. A 1959 report from Türk-İş's Representatives Committee, for instance, concluded, "Nowhere in the world can you create a free bargaining system where the right to strike isn't realized" (2002: 198). Yet, these were far from radical demands, as Türk-İş simply sought the means to engage in effective business unionism.
- 25 The military intervention of 27 May 1960 marked a critical juncture in Turkish politics and thereby in Turkish state-labor relations. After ousting the ruling Democrat Party, the Turkish military called upon a cohort of university professors to draft a new constitution that would open up the political system. The resulting constitution was dramatically more liberal than the previous system of government. Empowered with new freedoms and protected by greater civil liberties, the next two decades would bring increased political participation, as well as ideological polarization to Turkish political life. On the labor front, the new constitution expanded and safeguarded important labor rights, including the right to organize, form unions, and to strike. These legal reforms, combined with important changes within Turkish society associated with urbanization and rapid industrialization expanded the organizing opportunities for labor activists, and contributed to the growing importance of organized labor within Turkish politics.<sup>11</sup>
- 26 Indeed, soon after the military intervention intellectuals and activists on the left began to organize politically and within a host of left-wing publications. Within this context, the presence of a growing voice within labor circles that was motivated by a more radical agenda, as well as socialist and social-democratic ideas began to make itself known. This first occurred on 13 February 1961, when a coalition of 12 labor union activists formed the Turkish Workers' Party [*Türk İşçi Partisi* (TİP)]. According to party literature, the open market was harmful to Turkish interests because, as an underdeveloped country, Turkey was being exploited in the free market for the benefit of more developed countries (*TİP Handbook* 1964: 145). Consequently, TİP activists rejected free market policies, and

promoted a political agenda that called for the greater state intervention on behalf of the economic interests of the working class and of peasants. Within the Turkish labor movement, differences began to emerge over this political agenda. While the leadership of Türk-İş was wary of a radical political agenda, a growing number of labor activists were being influenced by socialist and communist ideologies, and were, therefore, becoming committed an alternative understanding of what types of actions were appropriate for Turkish labor unions.<sup>12</sup>

- 27 While it isn't necessarily the focus of this article, my research on the development of the labor movement in Turkey during the 1960s and 1970s points to two explanatory variables that address the question of why some unionists found it worth their energy to engage in more radical political unionism and some did not. The first involves the position of workers and union leaders within the broader structure of the Turkish economy, and the second highlights how particular moments of contention (between workers and industrial elites; between workers and the state; and between workers – eventually DİSK-affiliated unions – and Türk-İş) pushed some workers and labor leaders toward a more radical political unionism.
- 28 Indeed, differences within the Turkish labor movement over the political agenda of organized labor, and over the level of acceptable labor militancy, became increasingly stark throughout the 1960s. In different studies of the Turkish labor movement, Robert Bianchi (1984) and Toker Dereli (1968) have demonstrated that such differences within unions and the subsequent inclination toward more militant political activism tended to vary depending on the type of industry (state-run v. private), and the type of industry management (younger managers, older paternalists, and commercial profiteers). In general, during the early 1960s, those unions least inclined toward socialism and political unionism – were found in state economic enterprises. These unions demonstrated a willingness to forego militancy and political unionism in favor of material benefits and business unionism when the economy was good and such benefits were to be had, but became more militant and explicitly political beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the economy suffered and benefits diminished. On the other hand, during the early 1960s, unions most inclined toward socialist and/or social democratic political unionism were located primarily in privately-owned industries. Figure 1 presents an overview of membership in public and private sector unions.

Figure 1: Public Sector, Private Sector, and Total Union Membership, 1960-1980



- 29 Those opposed to political unionism drew inspiration from their American counterparts. This split became acute in late January and early February, 1964, when Türk-İş moved toward the adoption of an official policy of remaining “above party politics” [*partilerüstü politika*].<sup>13</sup> From one point of view, the adoption of an “above party politics” stance was inspired by TİP and the uneasiness of some Türk-İş leaders with members who sympathized with the party. Halil Tunç, for example, said that he did not support TİP because there needed to be “union consciousness” before political organization. “In those years,” he recalled, “you could find Justice Party unions, CHP unions.” Consequently, politics would have to wait until unions could be “independent from political parties” (Koç 1989: 70).
- 30 Remaining nominally above party politics also made a good deal of strategic sense to Türk-İş leaders, as it allowed the confederation to continue to force the parties in power and in opposition to compete for its support. In fact, Türk-İş’s leadership sought to capitalize on economic and political benefits that were promised by political parties that sought to harness the electoral support of the working class. The leadership of Türk-İş demonstrated a keen awareness of the potential material and political benefits that amicable ties to the dominant political party might elicit. That Türk-İş leaders’ strategies (especially during the 1960s) were influenced by this set of incentive structures is evident in at least three ways: First, through the decision to remain “above party politics.” Second, recognizing the chance to enhance their material and political goals, Türk-İş supported the Justice Party’s effort in the 1970 revisions to the laws governing union representation. This legislation, which will be discussed at greater length below, required a union to represent at least 1/3 of the workers in an industry in order to gain status as a legal representative, strengthening the position of Türk-İş as the largest confederation of labor unions in Turkey. Finally, the leadership of Türk-İş was careful to distance itself from militant union actions. In particular, the leadership of the national confederation moved to purge perceived socialist influences from the mine workers’ union responsible for the wildcat strikes in 1965 and punished affiliated unions that offered support to striking factory workers at the Paşabahçe Glassworks in 1966.<sup>14</sup>
- 31 Thus, the second factor shaping the emergence of political radicalism results from the way in which particular moments of contention fostered labor militancy within a segment of the Turkish labor movement. For these activists, the business unionism of Türk-İş failed to address the political and economic concerns of the Turkish working class. In the end, despite a strategic environment where state actors were seemingly providing the means for labor activists to achieve the goals of political inclusion and enhanced material benefits if they were willing to forego radical ideas and political unionism, efforts to incorporate labor unions were ultimately unsuccessful. For a significant and growing number of labor activists in Turkey, existing economic conditions were clearly understood as unfair, and in order to address these conditions a new alternative ideology for guiding union activity, with a concomitant alternative logic of appropriate behavior began to take hold. Consequently, the early 1960s saw the emergence of an alternative form of unionism that provided activists with an alternative basis of solidarity in political unionism and a rejection of the state’s (and, for that matter, Türk-İş’s) interpretation of legitimate behavior for workers and unions. This split in the Turkish labor movement culminated with the emergence of the Confederation of Revolutionary Labor Unions [*Devrimci İşçi Sendikası Konfederasyonu* (DİSK)] as a rival to Türk-İş.

- 32 The seeds of this split, first evident in the formation of the Turkish Workers' Party, began to grow following a wildcat strike by coalminers in Zonguldak, a region toward the Istanbul side of Turkey's Black Sea coast. In 1965, approximately 46,000 people worked in the region's coal mines (Roy 1974: 143). In March of 1965 a wildcat strike over what were perceived by workers as unfair changes in remuneration of bonus pay spread throughout the region. As Delwin Roy recounts in his examination of the events that occurred in Zonguldak from March 11-13, the strike began with 5,000 workers and spread from one mine and shift to the next, ultimately encompassing most of the region's 46,000 miners.
- 33 While the "bread and butter" issue of pay provided the genesis for the strike, the strike demonstrated a growing rank-and-file discontent with existing social, economic, and political conditions, and with the more moderate strategies advocated by Türk-İş's leadership. Toward this end, newspaper coverage of the strike highlighted the ways in which workers' understanding of the state's culpability for their insufficient wages and bad working conditions motivated both the initial work stoppage, and the continuance of it even after deadly clashes with police and military forces.
- 34 The leadership of the local union tried unsuccessfully to rein in the rank-and-file. Rather than accepting legitimate motivations for the workers' actions, union officials blamed outside agitators for fomenting worker recalcitrance. According to the union leadership (based on the statements from Türk-İş president Seyfi Demirsoy, Maden-İş president Kemal Özer, and the local union president Osman İpekçi) "the events in [Zonguldak] were a provocation, and this provocation had an external origin" (Besen 1965: 1). Indeed, Özer declared, "I don't know who is responsible for this provocation. This, the security officials will certainly get to the middle of. But, that this was a provocation is 100% certain" (Beşer, Besen, & Keklik 1965: 7).
- 35 That the union leadership neither supported nor controlled the militancy of the rank-and-file leads us to two conclusions: First, it highlights the different motivations of various actors in the labor movement. As Nichols and Kahveci point out, "[Union leaders] were insulated from the membership by their occupancy of permanent positions and they adopted a collaborative stance toward the state appointed management" (1995: 201). Second, it suggests that a number of rank-and-file Türk-İş members exhibited a willingness to engage in collective labor militancy.
- 36 The state's response to the coalminers' wildcat strike in Zonguldak represented an important turning point in the development of Turkish labor history. Here, for the first time since the formation of Türk-İş, the Turkish state mobilized its full repressive apparatus in an effort to control labor activism. And here, for one of the first times during this critical period, labor activists did not back down. In the clashes between the military, police, and the workers, two workers were shot dead, many were wounded, and forty-nine workers were arrested (Nichols and Kahveci 1995: 201). Moreover, the state sought to repress this demonstration of labor militancy, and marginalize those responsible for it.
- 37 Yet, it was only one year later, when the leadership of Türk-İş condemned an unauthorized strike in the Paşabahçe bottle and glass factory in Istanbul, that the full split within the Turkish labor movement occurred. This dispute between the confederation and the local union involved local factory workers' demands on one side, and the interests of Türk-İş to maintain industry-level bargaining on the other. On 31 January 1966 factory workers began a strike for better pay and working conditions. At a

meeting in Ankara on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, Türk-İş went over the head of the local union and workers and negotiated a protocol that would allow the company to fire any worker who had attacked the company, including union leaders. According to the protocol, workers would not be paid for the period of the strike, but would receive a larger bonus when work resumed. Local union workers and leaders refused to accept these terms and began a factory occupation. On 6 April, a meeting was held by unions who opposed Türk-İş's decision to end the strike; together they formed the Paşabahçe Strike Support Committee.

- 38 Strikers returned to work on 23 April after a state injunction ended the strike. In December, Türk-İş reprimanded and suspended those unions involved in the strike and their main supporters.<sup>15</sup> In many ways, this conflict proved to be the last straw for those within the labor movement who favored socialist ideas and more militant activism.<sup>16</sup> According to Turkish labor activist, Kemal Sülker, "The Paşabahçe strike opened a new road for development between unions. Türk-İş's opposition to workers' rights left the strikers stranded" (1968: 112).<sup>17</sup> On 15 January 1967, representatives from seventeen unions met in Istanbul and began to lay the groundwork for breaking away from Türk-İş. This conflict ultimately ended with these unions, in addition to the construction and bankers' unions, withdrawing from Türk-İş and forming the Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions (DİSK) on 13 February 1967. Of these events, TİP leader, Mehmet Ali Aybar, explained, "We went forward with the dream of creating a new confederation. [We believed] that Türk-İş was of no use to unionists, that they were not of the opinion to support workers' rights. In the end . . . [it was] decided to form a new confederation" (quoted in Beşeli 2002: 239).
- 39 The formation of DİSK was driven by more than a difference in strategies to achieve shared economic goals; it attests to the growth of a more politically radical Turkish labor activism driven by an alternative set of values. The values that underpinned this activism can be distilled, for example, from statements DİSK released upon its creation. Toward this end, the confederation listed fifteen reasons for its breaking away from Türk-İş. It is worthwhile to consider a few of the most important. First, the decision to break away was taken "Because Türk-İş is failing to apply with much effort the principles written in its constitution and decided on in its congresses" (DİSK 1967: 5). In addition, DİSK claimed that Türk-İş was failing to solve any of the important problems that workers faced. For instance, Türk-İş had not been an effective advocate regarding tax policy for workers, producers, farmers, or villagers (1967: 7). Furthermore, Türk-İş was seen as advocating a "politics that is contrary to social reality" (1967: 7-8). Citing financial support from the US Agency for International Development, DİSK concluded, "Türk-İş has withdrawn from national independence, and stands for independence with American help" (1967: 9). Subsequently, DİSK's founders argued that Türk-İş's ties to the US meant that its leaders were getting educated in a politics that was contrary to the needs of the Turkish workers. In short, DİSK was critical of Türk-İş's view that politics was a distraction and an impediment for workers (1967: 9-10). Finally, DİSK cited as justification for the split the belief that "Türk-İş has come out against every justified strike" (1967: 11).<sup>18</sup>
- 40 Taken together, these justifications mean that the decision to leave Türk-İş rested on the belief that Turkish unions needed to be independent from foreign exploitation, defend the rights of workers provided in the constitution, and improve the quality of life for the working class. The existing labor organizations and the existing system of state-labor

relations were seen as insufficient for addressing these concerns. In order to achieve these goals, “it was thought a true worker confederation’s creation” was needed (1967: 14). The founders of DİSK believed that, “Our confederation’s strengthening of the working class in the country’s administration will vanquish slavery and establish an order with the goal of equality and brotherhood from every direction, and will guarantee that the working class will play an influential role in [solving] the country’s problems” (1967: 16).

- 41 On the whole, whereas Turkish state actors (from the military to the dominant political parties) had historically sought to prevent the emergence of a radical labor politics, the formation of DİSK offered the Turkish working class a form of labor activism that valued engagement in militant, political unionism.<sup>19</sup> This alternative was premised on the belief that current social relations were better understood through a socialist interpretation of the salience of socioeconomic injustice and class antagonism on the one hand, and the belief that active political action could address these injustices on the other. As Ilkay Sunar summarizes, DİSK “subscribed to the radical view that the aim of the Turkish labor movement ought to be political – that is to say: the reconstruction of society rather than simply improved welfare within the bounds of the existing system” (1974: 164).
- 42 Further evidence of the values that underpinned DİSK activists’ conduct are revealed in the confederation’s understanding of what it meant to be “revolutionary.” Revolution, according to DİSK’s founders, involved: a revolution in nourishment, a revolution in housing (water and electricity as a basic right), a revolution in health (availability of and access to medical care as a political issue), a revolution in education (“We want all workers to be able to read and write”), a revolution in work (ending unjust power over workers, inequality faced by women and child laborers, allowing public sector unions, providing jobs for everyone), a revolution in national income, a revolution in taxes (lowering taxes for the working and productive classes), a revolution in workers’ production, a revolution in freedom from debts, and revolution in organization (DİSK, 1967: 21-28). “This is our revolutionism,” DİSK’s founders declared, “changing today’s conservative, regressive economic, social, and political relations in accordance with the constitution . . . . Revolutionism, so that everyone can own property and unionism working to guarantee the possibility of equally benefiting from civilization’s blessings” (1967: 31).
- 43 In the end, DİSK’s founders articulated six objectives or fundamental principles that guided its labor activism during the late 1960s and 1970s: First, a planned, statist economic system that was independent from foreign influence could solve working class problems. Second, the state should take a greater role in controlling and developing heavy industries and other key financial industries. Third, the state ought to play a greater role in assuring living standards and protecting the unemployed. Fourth, domestic and international events must be evaluated from a “scientific” viewpoint in order to raise a revolutionary working class consciousness. Fifth, there ought to be land reform that improves the living condition of rural populations and helps the unemployed. Finally, labor rights should not just involve economic or professional struggle: “In order to use the democratic rights that are in the constitution, political struggle, too, is needed” (1967: 32).
- 44 Membership numbers for Turkish labor unions are notoriously difficult to report with accuracy. It is widely acknowledged that Turkish labor laws encouraged the over-reporting of membership numbers. Consequently, what estimates are available often



vary. Nonetheless, DİSK, whose membership started around 67,000 in 1967 expanded to approximately 500,000 by 1980. By way of comparison, Türk-İş reported a membership of 497,857 in 1967, and an increase to 700,000 dues paying members by 1976. Defections from Türk-İş to DİSK between 1970 and 1973 contributed to a dramatic increase in DİSK's membership from 88,650 to 270,000.<sup>20</sup>

45 The hallmark of DİSK's activism was its willingness to explicitly challenge both Türk-İş and the state's understanding of legitimate action by advocating political unionism and militant workplace actions. Toward this end, in its election statement for the 1969 elections, DİSK announced its support for TİP, "Because the Turkish Workers' Party is the only party that will bring the working people to power" (DİSK, 1970:1). According to DİSK, "Only the Turkish Workers' Party accepts the struggle for a second independence against American imperialism, only TİP is working for a Turkey without an influence from a foreign state, only TİP offers a foreign policy of independence from the blocs" (1970: 2).

46 As one could have predicted, the main political parties' reaction to DİSK activism was to seek ways to harness the electoral support of the working class, while simultaneously stifling the growth of political unionism. Indeed, social science theory tells us that when labor mobilization comes to challenge the state, state actors will be more likely to move to co-opt and/or repress labor.<sup>21</sup> Of the important legislative changes designed to increase workers' rights and material conditions can be counted the Social Security Law of 1964, legislation granting state civil servants the right to unionize (also in 1964), minimum wage legislation (in 1972), and legislation targeting improvements in workers' health and job security (in 1974).<sup>22</sup> Moreover, according to Bianchi, especially after the emergence of DİSK:

The government became more willing to grant official recognition to [Türk-İş's] claims. Türk-İş leaders were commonly accepted as labor's exclusive representatives in mixed consultative board and regulatory commissions in the State Planning Organization, the Minimum Wage Commission, the State Economic Enterprises, the National Productivity Council, the Turkish Standards Institute, and in ad hoc consultative committees preparing labor legislation (1984: 126).

47 As Koç points out, these changes are better understood as an effort to influence and control the growth of the Turkish labor movement, rather than simply a series of concessions (2003: 106).

48 Efforts to gain union support did, in turn, shape the willingness of certain labor leaders and activists to cooperate with the state. This was particularly true in the case of Türk-İş's support for Law No. 1317, the 1970 labor law revisions proposed by the ruling Justice Party. The most important features of this legislation involved new restrictions on the ability of unions and union confederations to be legal representatives, easing of requirements needed to leave a union, new restrictions defining which workers had the legal right to organize, and new restrictions defining the time a worker must work in a work place in order to be eligible to form a union. DİSK and TİP activists argued that the intention of these changes was specifically to limit the activities and organizational abilities of its unions—an intention, they argued, that was revealed in public remarks prior to the law's passage and in the parliamentary debate. In fact, during the floor debate on the legislation, one Member of Parliament all but made this connection, saying the legislation was needed because, "TİP is Marxist and Leninist, not Atatürkist. TİP and DİSK are on the side of violence and tyranny" (quoted in *Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi* 1996: 451).



- 49 Adoption of these legal changes inspired massive protests organized by Istanbul factory workers. On the morning of 15 June 1970, 70,000 workers took to the streets in opposition to these new regulations governing labor unions. Though the actions were sponsored by DİSK, workers affiliated with Türk-İş unions joined in solidarity, with one union even threatening to withdraw from Türk-İş if the confederation failed to withdraw support for the legal changes (*Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi* 1996: 453). The two day protests were met with military and police repression, and on 16 June, with the declaration of martial law. These restrictions were accompanied by the closure of TİP on 10 July 1971, as well as other legal and constitutional changes that restricted union rights and freedoms – in particular the rights of civil servants and teachers to form unions.<sup>23</sup>
- 50 Again, the Turkish state demonstrated its willingness and capacity to mobilize repressive force, rather than concede to militant union actions. Yet, driven as they were by their ideological values and beliefs, Turkish labor activists who were committed to a vision of socialism and labor radicalism did not turn away from political unionism. In fact, the 1970s in Turkey was marked by an increasingly confrontational political environment. It was an environment in which clashes between the police, ultra-nationalist groups, and labor activists grew in frequency and intensity. It was an environment in which a commitment to political unionism persisted despite state repression and social counter-mobilization, and despite limited success in achieving policy goals.
- 51 Indeed, partially in response to the growing attraction of workers to DİSK, and partially in response to the declining ability of the state to offer material benefits during periods of economic hardship, some among the leadership of Türk-İş took on a more favorable view of political unionism. This process began during the 1969 Türk-İş convention, at which a more leftist mission was adopted, including the call for a 45 hour work week, collective bargaining rights for all workers, 20-40 days paid leave for workers, and the support for nine of its members as candidates for elected office. The influence of political unionism within Türk-İş was accelerated, however, in January, 1971, when four Türk-İş unions issued a report criticizing the confederation's enduring support for remaining "above party politics." This initial report gained the support of seven additional unions, and was followed by a second report calling for a social democratic order for the Turkish labor movement.
- 52 While this project was intended as an alternative to DİSK unionism and not universally accepted within Türk-İş, it did spur the growth of social-democratic activism and force a decade-long challenge to increase the confederation's acceptance of political unionism.<sup>24</sup> Toward this end, as Halil Tunç emerged as the President of Türk-İş, he "eventually became convinced that Türk-İş had to organize a political counteroffensive against new threats to union freedoms and to democracy itself" (Bianchi, 1984: 220). Consequently, during the 1970s, Turkish labor activism, on the whole embodied more of the values and ideas that had originally led to the emergence of DİSK, as it sought to address working class concerns and protect working class rights of association through militant actions, strikes, and demonstrations despite the persistence of state repression.
- 53 Furthermore, the emergence of a more militant and political unionism in Turkey contributed to and benefited from significant transformations within major political parties. Perhaps the most important change was the CHP's move toward a left-of-center stance in 1966. Amid the climate of labor activism, and under the leadership of Bülent Ecevit, the CHP evolved into a self-defined left-of-center party. Ecevit himself suggests

that the source and debate about the decision to embrace a left-of-center stance began after the 1965 parliamentary elections, and included a program of land reform, tax reform, advocacy for greater democratic rights for workers, and laws against the exploitation of labor (1973b: 16). As İlkey Sunar points out, the new CHP still maintained a commitment to populism “defined in terms of a commitment to integration, mobilization, and development” (1974: 177). The key difference, though, was the reformed CHP’s version of populism embraced the salient concerns of the working class.<sup>25</sup> Explaining his support for the shift to the left, Ecevit writes, “One of the characteristics of the period that followed the revolution of 27 May 1960, in Turkey, is the emergence of labor as a new social and political force” (1973a: 151). According to Ecevit, “This healthy development in the labor movement made possible by the democratization of Turkey, has contributed, in turn, to the strengthening of democracy in Turkey. Trade unions are now among the chief bulwarks of democracy in Turkey” (1973a: 174).

- 54 Though the shift toward a left-of-center stance began after 1965, its supporters fully consolidated their dominance of the party only in May 1972 when Ecevit was elected the party’s leader. After 1972, Ecevit described the party as democratic left; its ideology as populist and democratic (Ayata 1992: 87). The political and economic program of the party was not a rejection of capitalism, but sought to reform Turkey’s market economy in line with European social-democratic parties. This included the broader goals of social security for all working people, unemployment assistance, and health insurance for all citizens (Ayata 1992: 89-90).
- 55 Consequently, the pursuit of a social-democratic agenda and working class alliances became an important pillar for the CHP throughout the 1970s, contributing to the CHP’s electoral success in 1973 and 1977 (Keyder 1987: 57).<sup>26</sup> Toward this end, while actively and consistently opposing the political agenda of the right, DİSK actively supported the Republican People’s Party in the 1977 general elections. DİSK’s electoral concerns included: freedom of thought, organization, and expression in Turkey comparable to what other European countries enjoy; freedom for workers to choose the union that they want; an end to lockouts; the rights to organize, bargain collectively, and strike for all workers and civil servants; unemployment insurance; wage equality for women workers; social security for all workers; a fair tax system for all workers; protections for Turkish workers abroad; an end to the extraordinary power of the State Security Courts; democratization of the regulations regarding martial law; May Day as a state holiday; an end to limits on the right to strike; an end to all limits on democratic rights and freedoms (especially those imposed after the 12 March 1971 military intervention); and an end to the influence of the United States and NATO on Turkish politics (DİSK 1977: 5-7). Moreover, DİSK was increasingly concerned that the exploitation of workers was becoming easier with the rise of a “fascist order.” In such a political climate, it was thought opponents of the labor movement “will want to prohibit even the smallest strikes by citing [concerns for] ‘national security’” (DİSK 1977: 3). For DİSK, in order to advance this agenda and counteract these trends, the decision was made “to support the closest party to these concerns in the 1977 general election, the CHP” (DİSK 1977: 4).
- 56 Subsequently, throughout the 1970s, electoral trends indicate a correlation between electoral support for the CHP and the rise of support provided by the labor movement. While it is difficult to show with absolute certainty that the CHP’s embracing of a party platform and ideology that reflected the concerns expressed by the labor movement entirely explain the party’s increased electoral success, there is a clear correlation

between its electoral support before and after gaining labor movement support. In fact, the CHP increased its percentage of the popular vote from 27.4% in 1969 to 33.3% in 1973 and 41.4% in 1977. Moreover, the increased electoral support in both elections provided the CHP with the largest number of seats in parliament, giving the party the opportunity to lead the formation of a coalition government. Furthermore, the CHP was particularly successful within working class and poor neighborhoods in larger cities. In the poor *gecekondu* neighborhoods of Izmir and Istanbul, for example, the CHP's vote increased from 22.6% and 21.8% in 1969 to 44.2% and 47.5% in 1973 (Ayata1991: 91). Furthermore, between the years 1969-1973, there was a dramatic shift away from electoral support for the Justice Party [*Adalet Partisi* (AP)] in the coal mining regions of Zonguldak, with gains going mostly to the CHP. Specifically, the AP's vote declined from 55.6% to 38.2%, while the CHP's increased to 39.8% from 30.7%, and in 1977 the CHP's vote increased further, to 45.7% (Sayar & Esmer 2002: 201-205.)

- 57 The military coup that occurred in September of 1980 put a dramatic end to the broader climate of ideological confrontation, and ushered in a much more constrained political environment. The dramatic change in the broader political contexts also changed the nature of labor activism in Turkey. In many ways, the stark ideological and tactical differences that divided the Turkish labor movement in the 1960s and 1970s disappeared in favor of a more unified labor movement in the decades since. Whereas the 1960 military coup sought to open up the political system, the 1980 military intervention specifically sought to promote stability by depoliticizing society and ending the era of ideological confrontation. In the months that followed the military's intervention, the National Security Council demonstrated how harshly labor unions would be treated: three confederations were closed; compulsory arbitration replaced collective bargaining; and the right to strike was suspended. In addition, nearly two thousand labor activists from DİSK were arrested, many spent years in prison waiting for their trials to be heard.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, just as the new constitution restricted civil rights and liberties, so too the new law covering organized labor (Law Number 2822) restricted the scope of legal strikes.

28

- 58 Without a partner in the state and as a result of the thorough repression of the most extreme leftwing ideologues, what emerged in the 1980s and 1990s was a labor movement that, although still organizationally fractured, was far more unified than ever before. According to Yıldırım Koç, in the 1980s there were two main bases for cooperation between union confederations: the state's effort to control radical labor reduced the ideological differences between the major confederations, and the 1990s economic crises provided material incentives for unified collective action.<sup>29</sup> Thus, collaboration between the major union confederations was focused both on securing changes to the legal restrictions imposed by the 1982 constitution and post-coup legal environment, as well on organizing opposition to the state's privatization reforms and capitulations to the institutions of neo-liberal globalization.
- 59 Moreover, though some of the radicalism of the past may not have been brought forward, labor activism since 1980 has been, at times, every bit as political and confrontational as it was in the past. In addition to joint efforts to promote labor's opposition to the privatization of state-owned industries in particular, and neo-liberal globalization in general, the various organizations within the Turkish labor movement have jointly held large and confrontational rallies and protests on May Day. Clearly, the narrowing of divisions within the Turkish labor movement indicates that the broader political and

ideological context that underpins labor activism today is different from those of the 1960s and 1970s. Still, I believe the divergences within prior labor activism are important both to our understanding of Turkish politics, and to our understanding of social movements more generally. Moreover, despite greater levels of cooperation, competition within the Turkish labor movement continues. For example, in May and June 2004, the DİSK-affiliated Birleşik Metal İş issued a formal complaint to the International Labor Organization about raids on its unions by the metal workers' union affiliated with Türk-İş, Türk Metal İş. According to one of these complaints, on the night of 11 March 2004, third shift workers at a factory in Gebze, "were locked in the factory till next morning and then they were forced to resign from our Union and to register to another Union."<sup>30</sup> Such incidents demonstrate that competition between union confederations still shapes the Turkish labor movement.

## Conclusion

- 60 Rationalist explanations that focus on the strategic, cost-benefit calculus of individuals are insufficient for explaining the split within the Turkish labor movement in the 1960s. From a distance, it seems irrational and counterproductive for schisms to divide labor movements. Turkey is an especially prescient example: in a nation with an oversupply of cheap labor, with an historic hostility to class-based organization, and with concerted industrial opposition to unionization, it seems self-evident that a united labor movement would be preferential to a divided one. Furthermore, this divide and the persistence of militant activism seems paradoxical when various Turkish state actors demonstrated a willingness to repress radical labor activism, and at the same time to offer positive incentives for labor activists who rejected militant activism. Throughout the narrative provided above, I allude to instances of repression. Presumably, when faced with the types of negative incentives embodied by these instances of repression, we would expect to see labor activists willing to moderate their activities – or at least to see the free rider problem become more difficult to overcome. On the contrary, some of the largest and most contentious collective action in the Turkish labor movement took place after these moments of repression.
- 61 Structural explanations are also insufficient for explaining this split; while large-scale structural transformations provided the conditions that allowed for the growth of the Turkish labor movement (i.e. urbanization and industrialization, as well as the opening of legal opportunities to organize), as scholars who study social movements have pointed out, these structural conditions must be interpreted by political actors. Indeed, despite facing similar structural conditions, a clear split emerged within the Turkish labor movement. Yet, this split can be easily explained by taking seriously the role of ideology in shaping collective action, or the varying the logic of appropriateness resulting from alternative institutions.
- 62 Analytically, there are three comparative implications we can draw from this analysis of the divergence in the Turkish labor movement. First, one of the most important implications of this split in Turkish labor activism is what it implies about the relationship between repression and labor movements. The point I'm making is not necessarily new; others have noted the way repression can help sustain rather than undermine activists' commitment to direct action.<sup>31</sup> However, I hope to clarify our analysis of when and how repression shapes movement activism by suggesting that

repression is less likely to moderate movement rhetoric and action when activists are motivated by alternative ideologies, and new institutional logics of appropriateness underpin collective action.

- 63 Second, the history of labor activism in Turkey demonstrates that such schisms in labor movements have important and enduring consequences, especially when they involve a divergence in types of social conduct. Indeed, differences within the labor movement have been cited by some as part of the explanation for the inability of the Turkish labor movement to withstand the massive repression it suffered with the 12 September 1980 military coup. Ahmet Samim (1987), for instance, sees the factional conflict between socialists, communists, and social democrats that emerged in Turkish labor activism during the 1970s as a waste of resources that contributed to the failure to generate enough popular support to resist repression. “Instead of demonstrating that there were rational and reachable alternatives to the urgent – and obviously social problems of every day life,” he laments, “Turkish socialists offered voluminous debates on whether or not the ‘Theory of Three Worlds’ was opportunist” (1987: 170).
- 64 Finally, this analysis of the schism in Turkish labor politics has implications for the way we examine the importance of ideologies in the context of rationalist analyses. The case of the Turkish labor movement confirms that, in fact, ideological motivations ought to be an important component of our analysis of the choices made by activists. It suggests, for example, that we take seriously the analysis of how activists’ values can inform movement strategies, actions, and goals. Moreover, this study suggests that we can better tell exactly how ideas matter by focusing on how activists act in ways that defy simple cost-benefit calculations.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahmad, Feroz (1994) “The Development of Working-Class Consciousness in Turkey”, in Lockman Zachary (ed.) *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles, Histories, Historiographies*, Albany, NY, SUNY Press.

Ahmad, Feroz (1993) *The Making of Modern Turkey*, London, Routledge.

Ayata, Ayşe Güneş (1992) *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi: Örgüt ve İdeoloji* [The Republican People’s Party: Organization and Ideology], Ankara, Andoğan Yayınları.

Bates, Robert H.; Greif, Avner; Levi, Margaret; Rosenthal, Jean-Laurent; Weingast, Barry R. (1998) *Analytic Narratives*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Berik, Günseli; Bilginsoy, Cihan (1996) “The Labor Movement in Turkey: Labor Pains, Maturity, Metamorphosis”, in Goldberg, Ellis Jay (ed.) *The Social History of Labor in the Middle East*, Boulder, CO, Westview Press.

Besen, Halûk (1965) “Olayların Gerçek Sebepleri” [There are definite reasons for the events], *Cumhuriyet Gazetesi*, March 15, p. 1.

Beşeli, Mehmet (2002) “1960-1980 Döneminde Sendikacılık Hareketleri İçinde Demokrasi Kavramının Gelişimi” [The Development of Democratic Concepts in the Turkish Union Movement in the 1960-1980 Period], in Işıklı, Alpaslan (ed.) *Türkiye’de Sendikacılık Hareketleri İçinde Demokrasi Kavramının Gelişimi* [The Development of Democratic Concepts in the Union Movement in Turkey], Ankara, Kalkan Matbaacılık.

Bianchi, Robert (1984) *Interest Groups and Political Development in Turkey*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press.

Chong, Dennis (1991) *Collective Action and the Civil Rights Movement*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Collier, Ruth Berins; Collier, David (1991) *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Cornfield, Daniel B.; Fletcher, Bill (1998) “Institutional Constraints on Social Movement “Frame Extention”: Shifts in the Legislative Agenda of the American Federation of Labor, 1881-1955”, *Social Forces*, vol. 76, No 4, pp. 1305-1321.

Della Porta, Donatella ; Diani, Mario (1999) *Social Movements: An Introduction*, Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishers.

Dereli, Toker (1968) *The Development of Turkish Trade Unionism*, Istanbul, Istanbul, University Faculty of Economics.

Dereli, Toker (1992) “Turkey” in Campbell, Joan (ed.) *European Labor Unions*, Westport, CT, Greenwood Press.

DİSK (1977) *DİSK’in 1977 Genel Seçimlerinde CHP’yi Destekleme Kararının Gerekçesi ve Nedenleri* [The Reason and Need for DİSK’s Decision to Support the RPP in the 1977 General Elections], Istanbul, Yeni Ofset Basımevi.

DİSK (1970) “Demokratik Toplumcu ve DİSK” [Democratic Socialism and DİSK], Istanbul, Çınar Matbaası.

DİSK (1967) *DİSK Kuruluş Bildirisi, Anatüzülüğü* [DİSK’s Establishment Communiqué, Main Principles], Istanbul, Istanbul Matbaası.

Earl, Jennifer (2003) “Tanks, Tear Gas, and Taxes: Toward a Theory of Movement Repression,” *Sociological Theory*, vol. 21, No 1, pp. 44-68.

Ecevit, Bülent (1973a) “Labor in Turkey as a New Social and Political Force,” in Karpat, Kemal (ed.) *Social Change and Politics in Turkey: A Structural-Historical Analysis*, Leiden, E.J. Brill.

Ecevit, Bülent (1973b) *Ortanın Solu* [Left of Center], Ankara, Tekin Yayınevi.

Epstein, Edward C. (1989) “Conclusion: The Question of Labor Autonomy,” in Epstein, Edward C. (ed.). *Labor Autonomy and the State in Latin America*, Boston, Unwin Hyman.

Güneş-Ayata, Ayşe (1990) “Class and Clientelism in the Republican People’s Party,” in Finkel, Andrew; Sirman, Nükhet (eds.) *Turkish State, Turkish Society*, London, Routledge.

Karpat, Kemal (1973) “Social Groups and the Political System After 1960,” in Karpat, Kemal (ed.) *Social Change and Politics in Turkey: A Structural-Historical Analysis*, Leiden, E.J. Brill.

Keyder, Çağlar (1987) “The Political Economy of Turkish Democracy,” in Schick, Irvin; Tonak, Ertağul Ahmet (eds.) *Turkey in Transition: New Perspectives*, New York, Oxford University Press.

Koç, Yıldırım (2003) *Türkiye İşçi Sınıfı ve Sendikacılık Tarihi* [Turkey Working Class and Union History], Ankara, YOL-İş.

- Koç, Yıldırım (ed.) (1998) *Türk-İş Tarihinden Portreler Eski Sendikacılardan Anılar – Gözlemler*, Ankara, Türk-İş.
- Koç, Yıldırım (1999) *Workers and Trade Unions in Türkiye*, Ankara, Türk-İş.
- Levi, Margaret (1997) *Consent, Dissent, and Patriotism*, New York, Cambridge University Press.
- Lichback, Mark Irving (1995) *The Rebel's Dilemma*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press.
- Lipovsky, Igor (1992) *The Socialist Movement in Turkey, 1960-1980*, Leiden, E.J. Brill.
- March, James G.; Olsen, Johan (2004) "The Logic of Appropriateness," ARENA Centre for European Studies Working Papers, url: [https://www.arena.uio.no/publications/working-papers2004/papers/wp04\\_9.pdf](https://www.arena.uio.no/publications/working-papers2004/papers/wp04_9.pdf).
- March, James G.; Olsen, Johan (2008) "The Logic of Appropriateness," in Goodin, Robert E.; Rein, Martin; Moran, Michael (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Mello, Brian (2006) "Evaluating Social Movement Impacts: Labor and the Politics of State-Society Relations," Ph.D, diss: University of Washington.
- Mello, Brian (2007) "Explaining Divergent Strategies in Turkish Labor History, 1960-1980," in *Social Movement Studies*, vol. 6, No 3, pp. 207-225.
- McAdam, Doug (2004) "Revisiting the U.S. Civil Rights Movement: Toward a More Synthetic Understanding of the Origins of Contention," in Goodwin, Jeff; Jasper, James (eds.) *Rethinking Social Movements: Structure, Meaning, and Emotion*, Lanham, Rowan & Little Field Publishers.
- Millen, Bruce H. (1969) "Factions of the Turkish Labor Movement Differ Over Political Role," in *Monthly Labor Review*, June, pp. 31-35.
- Murillo, Maria Victoria (2001) *Labor Unions, Partisan Coalitions, and Market Reforms in Latin America*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Nichols, Theo; Kahveci, Erol (1995) "The Condition of Mine Labour in Turkey: Injuries to Miners in Zonguldak, 1942-1990," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 31, No 2, pp. 197-214.
- North, Douglass C (1981) *Structure and Change in Economic History*, New York, W.W. Norton & Company.
- Olson, Mancur (1965) *The Logic of Collective Action*, Cambridge Harvard University Press.
- Roy, Delwin (1974) "The Zonguldak Strike: A Case Study of Industrial Conflict in a Developing Society," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 10, No 2, pp. 142-185.
- Samim, Ahmet (1987) "The Left," in Schick, Irvin; Tonak, Ertagrul Ahmet (eds.) *Turkey in Transition: New Perspectives*, New York, Oxford University Press.
- Sarıca, Murat (1966) *Toplumcu Açidan: Halkçılık, Milliyetçilik, Devrimcilik* [From the Socialist Point of View: Populism, Nationalism, Revolutionism], Istanbul, Türkiye İşçi Partisi.
- Sayarı, Sabri; Esmer, Yılmaz (eds.) (2002) *Politics, Parties, and Elections in Turkey*, Boulder, Lynne Reinner Publishers.
- Scott, James (1976) *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*, New Haven, Yale University Press.
- Sunar, İlkey (1974) *State and Society in the Politics of Turkey's Development*, Ankara, Ankara University Press.



Thompson, E.P. (1971) "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," in *Past & Present*, No 50, pp. 76-136.

*Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi (Encyclopedia of Turkish Unionism)* (1996), Istanbul, Kültür Bakanlığı ve tarih vakfı'nın Ortak Yayınlarıdır, vols. 1-3.

Türk-İş (2002), "Türk-İş Mümessiller Heyeti'ne Sunulan Rapor (1959)" [Türk-İş's Representatives Committee Summary Report (1959)], in Koç, Yıldırım (ed.) *Belgelerle Türk-İş Tarihi*, vol. 1, Ankara, Yorum Matbaası.

Türk-İş (2002) "Türk İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu Ana Nizamnamesi (1952)" [Türk-İş's Governing Laws (1952)] in Koç, Yıldırım (ed.) *Belgelerle Türk-İş Tarihi*, vol. 1., Ankara, Yorum Matbaası.

Weber, Max (1969) *Basic Concepts in Sociology*, New York, Greenwood Press.

Zürcher, Erik J (2004) *Turkey: A Modern History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., New York, I.B. Tauris & Co.

## NOTES

\*. Research for this article was made possible by a grant from the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies, and by a Dissertation Writing Grant from the Institute of Turkish Studies. Earlier versions of this paper were presented before the Turkish Studies Group at the University of Washington, and at the 2006 Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association. I thank discussants and participants at both forums for their feedback and suggestions. I also want to thank the EJTS editorial board, and the external reviewers for their insightful and helpful feedback on this article, particularly in helping to clarify the larger analytical framework.

1. State incorporation captures the situation where few autonomous labor organizations exist prior to the state's construction of them. State incorporation is often less tolerant of leftist unionism. Party incorporation often involves concessions to labor organizations and a greater tolerance for the left. They identify three types of party incorporation: electoral, which involves the incorporation of labor by existing parties; labor populism, where new parties draw on labor; and radical populism, where peasants, as well as labor organizations are incorporated into politics (Collier & Collier, 1991: 746).

2. Critics of Olson's original framing of collective action problems, of course, point out that solidarity incentives (including reputation and the benefits obtained through shared identity formation) may be as, or more important in explaining social movement activism. See, for example, Chong (1991) McAdam (2004). Lichbach (1995) also builds upon Olson's original framing of collective action problems in addressing the rebel's dilemma: to rebel (and get others to join you), or not to rebel.

3. See, for example, Della Porta and Diani (1999: 240).

4. Murillo, rightly, suggests that we need to take a broader view of militancy – focusing on more than just strikes, especially as repertoires of contentious politics change. She cites, for example, streaking during a protest at a Ford plant in Mexico in 1992.

5. Promoting labor activism is a goal of the state's because it represents one way for a state to mobilize compliance, participation, and legitimation. Consequently, state-sponsored labor activism can lower the transaction costs for enforcing rules by diffusing enforcement mechanisms and tying parts of the population into nationalist ideology – a cognitive schema through which people make sense of their world. See, for example, North (1981: 48-49).

6. Labor autonomy is defined here as "a relational term resulting from the respective power capacities of union and state actors" (Epstein 1989: 278).

7. I am grateful to Arda Ibikoğlu and Tuna Kuyucu for warning me that this may be an unfair assumption to make about the preferences of labor activist in general. Perhaps, they suggest, this is a characterization that fits mainly with the experience of the American labor movement. While this concern is fair, my interactions with Turkish labor activists lead me to believe it is at least a fair assumption to make about many within Turkish labor unions today.
8. History shows this to be the case for both democratic and Communist regimes.
9. In this analysis the primary focus is on DİSK, but the emergence of two other labor confederations during the 1970s (one tied to the nationalist right – MİSK, and one tied to Islamist politics – Hak-İş) further reflects this period of ideological and institutional contestation.
10. For a full consideration of the early history of Turkish labor activism, see chapter three of Mello (2006).
11. Concerning the structural changes taking place within the Turkish society and economy, Feroz Ahmad states: “By the end of the 1960s, the character of Turkey’s economy and society had changed almost beyond recognition. Before the 1960s, Turkey had been predominantly agrarian with a small industrial sector dominated by the state. By the end of the decade, a substantial private industrial sector had emerged so much so that industry’s contribution to the GNP almost equaled that of agriculture, overtaking it in 1973. This was matched by rapid urbanization as peasants flocked to the towns and cities in search of jobs and a better way of life” (1993: 134).
12. Certainly, the emergence of leftist activism within Turkish politics and within the Turkish labor movement were not unique during this time period. Zürcher, for example, highlights how the emergence of the leftist student activism, leftist labor activism, leftist intellectual debates and periodicals, and leftist politics in Turkey in general, occurred at the same time as, and was often influenced by similar movements in France, Germany, and the United States (2004: 253-256).
13. The actual implication of this stance was not a complete avoidance of political concerns. In fact, in the 1965 general elections Türk-İş published a blacklist in Milliyet Gazetesi that opposed ten candidates for parliament. Despite the efforts of Türk-İş’s leadership to stress their support for what would benefit the Turkish people and not just the working class, this action was opposed by the state, and on 18 August 1965 the 3rd Court of Justice in Ankara issued a warrant for the police to search the Türk-İş building; 100 campaign books were confiscated in the search. Then, on 28 August 1965 three Türk-İş representatives were arrested in Tokat during a campaign stop. In the end, the confederation was acquitted of any wrong-doing, and only three of the candidates that it had opposed were re-elected (Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi 1996: 334).
14. See, for example, Bianchi, (1984 : 216).
15. Petrol-İş and Kristal-İş were suspended from the confederation for fifteen months; Maden-İş for six; and Basın-İş for three.
16. The punishment of strike supporters followed the failure to support striking coal miners in March, 1965 and the prohibiting of TİP-supported unionists from taking part in the 7-14 March, 1966 Türk-İş convention (Beşeli 2002: 239).
17. Sülker was a former general secretary of DİSK.
18. Among the litany of strikes specifically cited are the 1965 Zonguldak strike and, of course, the Paşabahçe strike.
19. One exception to this was Bülent Ecevit. As the Labor Minister for the CHP government following the 1960 military intervention, Ecevit coordinated the effort to develop and implement the new laws governing labor relations and providing unions the right to strike.
20. See, for example, (“Türk-İş’e üye Kuruluşlar” 2002: 160-164); and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, “Türk-İş” and “DİSK,” <http://www.fes.de/fulltext/bueros/istanbul/00253003.htm#LOCE9E3> (accessed Oct. 20, 2005).
21. See, for example, Murillo (2001); Epstein (1989); and Collier and Collier (1991).

22. For a complete list of legislative changes regarding working class and union concerns, see, Koç (2003: 103-106).
23. The party's support for class-based politics, as well as its growing emphasis on Kurdish political rights, contributed to the decision to close TİP.
24. In fact, just as it had prohibited TİP members from taking part in the 1966 Türk-İş convention, at the 1973 convention in Ankara, supporters of social democratic unionism were kept out. This contributed to the decision of four unions to leave the confederation and join DİSK: Genel-İş (1975), OLEYİS (1977), Ges-İş (1975), and Çağdaş Metal İş (1973) (Beşeli 2002: 240-241). And, at the 10th Türk-İş convention in 1976, 2/3 of those present supported a change to the 'above party politics' principle. Nonetheless, leadership opposition prevented a change from coming to fruition (Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi 1996: 340).
25. Sunar writes, "The new populism was designed to appeal to the growing mood of discontent, especially among the low-paid public employees, urban service workers, small shopkeepers and artisans, poor peasants, and unemployed" (1974: 180). As Ayşe Güneş Ayata emphasizes, "The left of center movement in 1966 claimed a much different ideology of populism than the populism of the 1930s" (1992: 83).
26. Perhaps, though, one should be careful not to ascribe too much to this recognition of class activism. Thus, Berik and Bilginsoy (1996: 46) point out that the CHP remained largely ambivalent toward DİSK.
27. Of these arrests, Koç writes: "The majority of them suffered torture of various degrees. The martial law military public prosecutor requested the execution of 78 leaders, imprisonment of 1399 and the liquidation of the trade unions and DİSK" (1999: 64).
28. For example, Dereli points out that under the legal changes, "a lawful strike or lockout deemed likely to endanger public health or national security may be suspended for sixty days by government order and taken to compulsory arbitration at the end of that period" (1992: 472.)
29. Personal interview at Yol-İş national headquarters in Ankara, 22 April 2004.
30. "Violations of Trade Union Rights in Colakoğlu Metalurji A.S. in Turkey," unpublished complaint to the ILO/Committee on Freedom of Association.
31. See, for example, Della Porta and Diani (1999: 211) and Earl (2003).

## ABSTRACTS

In the mid-1960s, a schism split the Turkish labor movement into two confederations. One, the Confederation of Turkish Labor Unions (Türk-İş) continued to pursue a path that rejected militant activism and radical ideologies in favor of an American-inspired business unionism. The other, the Revolutionary Confederation of Labor Unions (DİSK), criticized Türk-İş's policy of remaining "above party politics," embracing both a radical socialist ideology, and organizing the most militant actions in Turkish labor history. This paper explores why these two confederations, facing the same set of incentive structures and background structural conditions adopted radically different courses of action. I seek to explain the split within the Turkish labor movement in the 1960s by focusing on how alternative ideologies emerged within the Turkish labor movement, in conjunction with alternative institutions. Insofar as the existing economic policies and the regime of labor relations in Turkey was increasingly seen as unfair, the founding members of DİSK developed a counter ideology characterized by a more radical political agenda

that called for greater direct action on the part of Turkish workers. What emerged in Turkey was an ideologically fragmented labor movement where different institutions maintained (at times) distinct goals for the political and economic development of Turkey, distinct conceptions of the role labor unions should play politically, and as a result, different levels of collective political action.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** labor unions, Turkey, union confederations, ideology

## AUTHOR

**BRIAN MELLO**

Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Muhlenberg College, 2400 Chew Street, Allentown, PA 18104. [bmello@muhlenberg.edu](mailto:bmello@muhlenberg.edu)